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ABSTRACT

The research reported was a part of the Central Kentucky Vocational Education Evaluation Project (VEEP), a locally directed, State-assisted evaluation effort with personnel from eighteen school systems and the regional vocational education staff. The purposes were to identify successful approaches for operating student committees and to determine opinions held by students and educators regarding the operation and function of the student committees. Two questionnaires were used, one for local project directors and assistant project directors, and other for members of the student committee. Size of committees, member selection criteria, structure of organization, length and frequency of meetings, major activities, problems encountered, and a general evaluation of student committees were assessed. Opinions of directors were compared with opinions of student committee members; data on 21 statements were tabulated and individually analyzed. Recommendations include (1) school systems using student committees should continue to do so, (2) school systems without student committees should organize them, (3) student committees can be used for areas other than evaluation, (4) further experimentation is needed, (5) additional research should be conducted, and (6) the use of student committees should be taught in preservice and inservice teacher education programs. (MS)

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# USING STUDENT COMMITTEES IN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM EVALUATION

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# USING STUDENT COMMITTEES IN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM EVALUATION

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years much has been said and written about the importance of involving students in decision making processes. However, there is a critical need for invention, experimentation, and evaluation concerning the appropriate methods of student involvement. We desperately need to develop desirable practices for dealing with student groups. These practices may not be the same for all situations. In other words, the involvement of students is not an easy task. However, students represent a great untapped resource in assisting with the management of the educational system.

The initiation and operation of a student committee can involve a complex pattern of relationships. For the most part, organized attempts to meaningfully involve students in educational management have been totally neglected. There is very little documented literature concerning the operation of student committees. Without question, there is a dearth of research concerning the use of student committees.

The research reported in this article is a report of a sub-study conducted as a part of the Central Kentucky Vocational

Education Evaluation Project (VEEP).[1] VEEP was a locally-directed, state-assisted evaluation effort in the Central Kentucky Region. Personnel representing eighteen school systems and the regional staff for vocational education were involved in the project. The participating school systems included the area vocational school, vocational extension centers, county school systems, and independent school systems.

The points emphasized in VEEP included local involvement, performance objectives, product-oriented evaluation, and continuous evaluation. As part of the emphasis on local involvement, many of the school systems organized and used student committees as a means of effectively involving students in the evaluation process.

## THE PROBLEM

The broad purposes of the study were to identify successful approaches for operating student committees and to determine opinions held by students and educators regarding the operation and function of the student committees.

The educational enterprise is a most complex system. In nearly all of the program improvement efforts conducted in the educational setting, there is one key lesson. Unless citizens, students, and educators are personally involved in the process of designing and conducting program improvement

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[1]Floyd L. McKinney, Alfred J. Mannebach, and C. O. Neel, Final Report of the Central Kentucky Vocational Education Evaluation Project (Frankfort: Program Supporting Services Division, Bureau of Vocational Education, 1972).

efforts, attempts to improve the program will not be likely to result in much success. There is little doubt that we can master the technological barriers to educational program improvement; the big hurdles are the barriers in the minds of people. We can assist in breaking down these barriers when we involve people to the extent that they have full knowledge of the needs for program improvement. Involvement of students and others should broaden their perspectives and assist in breaking down rigid attitudes regarding change.

Educators, at all levels, have frequently expressed a desire to involve students more effectively in the decision-making process. If educators and students are to work effectively in harmony through a student committee structure, it is important that both possess an understanding of the opinions of each other regarding the operation and function of the student committee. Also, it would be helpful to have organizational structures and meaningful activities for student committees identified. The basic problem of the study then became: What are the organizational patterns and evaluation and other activities of student committees and what are the differences between educators and students concerning the operation and function of the student committee?

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were:

1. To identify the organizational structure used by the student committees.

2. To identify the kinds of activities in which the members of the student committees were engaged.

3. To identify the ways in which student committees will be used by the school systems in future activities related to vocational education program evaluation.

4. To identify those activities students and members of the school staff believe should have been undertaken by the student committees

5. To identify differences in the perceptions of student members of the committees and the expectations of the local directors and assistant directors of the evaluation efforts concerning the functions and operations of the student committees.

## RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Eleven school systems participating in the Central Kentucky Vocational Education Evaluation Project had organized student committees. The population surveyed in the study included the members of the student committees, the local project directors, and assistant project directors.

Two questionnaires were used in the study. A review of literature regarding the operation and function of student committees was undertaken as the first step in the development of the questionnaires. One questionnaire was developed for the local project directors and the assistant project directors, and the other questionnaire was developed for members of the student committee. Part I of each questionnaire was designed

to obtain factual information about the two groups respectively. Part II of the questionnaires was designed to obtain the opinions of the local project directors, the assistant project directors, and the student committee members. Respondents were asked to indicate agreement or disagreement with individual items on the questionnaire along a five-point scale.

A letter explaining the study was sent to the administrators and project directors of schools having student committees. The letter asked for the cooperation of the school system with the study. Following acceptance, the questionnaires were mailed to the local project directors. The local project directors were responsible for distributing the questionnaires to members of the student committee and for returning them to the study directors.

## FINDINGS

According to the local project directors, there was a total of 110 students on student committees in the eleven school systems. The range of students on each committee was from five to twenty with a mean of ten. In most cases, students were selected by teachers and by students with staff approval. Selection of students was based upon citizenship, scholarship, school activities, attendance, and representativeness of the student body. Attempts were made to include students from all ethnic, social, and economic groups. Most committees had a chairman, a vice-chairman, and a secretary. In over half of the school systems, students were responsible for electing the officers of the committee.

The number of student committee meetings in the individual school systems ranged from two to thirteen with a mean of five. The mean number of minutes per meeting was fifty-six. The range of minutes per meeting was from twenty to ninety. A majority of the meetings were held during school time. Over one-half of the student committees met once per month or more. In most cases, the teachers and committee chairmen called the meetings. Over one-third of the local project directors stated that the teachers and the student committee chairmen planned the agenda cooperatively.

The local project directors were asked to list the major activities of the student committee on evaluation. Assistance with student follow-up was the most popular activity followed closely by the formulation of recommendations. Recommendations formulated by the student committees included the development of dress codes and codes of conduct, changes in school policies, establishment of attendance requirements, and suggestion of types of social activities to be held in the school. Other activities of the student committees included planning school tours, administering surveys, assisting with evaluations, placing a suggestion box in the school, developing bulletin board displays, organizing an alumni association, developing orientation programs, and pre-testing follow-up instruments.

Possible future activities of the student committees listed by the project directors included planning curriculum improvement, assisting with follow-up activities, conducting surveys, and attending inservice education and citizens

advisory committee meetings. Other activities listed included assisting with job placement, revising school policies, rating teacher effectiveness, surveying business and industry, informing the community of evaluation efforts, and planning for outside speakers.

The major problem of the local project directors regarding the use of student committees was arranging meeting times. The reasons for the problem were that students missed classes, longer meeting times were needed than were available in most cases, and other meetings conflicted with meetings of the student committee. A few local project directors reported that they had trouble interpreting the role of the student committee to the students. This problem may have resulted because few guidelines have been established for student committee operation. The selection of members of the student committee also caused difficulty, especially when the schools desired to organize a student committee that was representative of the total student body. Other problems mentioned were lack of organization, difficulty in communication, difficulty in interpreting rules to the students, and difficulty in keeping meetings from becoming "gripe sessions."

The local project directors and assistant project directors were asked, "To what extent do you feel that the student committee contributed to the evaluation effort in your school?" Approximately ninety-five percent of the respondents stated that the student committee had contributed to either "some extent" or a "great extent" in the evaluation

effort. All of the local project directors and the assistant project directors were of the opinion that the student committee could make significant contributions to evaluation efforts in the future. Approximately ninety percent of the local project directors and assistant directors indicated that the student committee would be continued.

Part I of the questionnaire for members of the student committee was designed to gather information about the students. Seventy-eight students responded to the questionnaire. Over seventy percent responding were seniors, twenty percent were juniors, and ten percent were out-of-school adults.

The students were asked to list the major accomplishments of the student committee during the school year. The most frequently listed accomplishment was the formulation of recommendations. Recommendations were made concerning improvement of vocational and academic programs, condition of equipment, availability of materials, teaching procedures used, classroom climate, and school rules.

Twenty students reported that they had assisted with follow-up activities, and ten students distributed surveys. The surveys distributed were student interest surveys and parent surveys. Several students reported that they had monitored the administration of the Ohio Vocational Interest Survey. Other major accomplishments reported by members of the student committees included improving breaktime schedules, evaluating school programs, encouraging school awareness, planning improvement for the parking lot, and improving lunchroom procedures.

The students were asked to indicate what the committee should accomplish in the future. Forty students indicated that student committees should formulate recommendations. Thirteen students reported that a major activity should be to evaluate school programs, while ten students reported that an appropriate activity would be to obtain student opinions of vocational education programs. Other activities suggested for consideration by student committees in the future included assisting with follow-up activities, planning for community involvement in educational programs, discussing the philosophy of vocational education, and orienting new students to the school and to vocational education.

Over one-half of the students reported that the best size for the student committee was from eight to ten members. This was congruent with the finding reported by the project directors that the mean number of members on the student committees was ten.

Opinions of Project Directors and Student Committee Members

The opinions of the nineteen local project directors and assistant project directors were compared with the opinions of the seventy-eight members of the student committees regarding the structure and activities of the student committees on evaluation. The data were collected on Part II of the questionnaires for students and project directors.

The hypotheses formulated for the opinion part of the study stated that the members of the student committee should have significantly different mean scores on each item of Part II

of the questionnaires than the project directors. The null hypotheses tested was $M_1 = M_2$.

Data in Table I reveal the mean scores of the student committee members and the project directors for each item on the questionnaire. The value of the t-ratio and the t-test probabilities for each item on the questionnaire are also revealed. In accordance with the research hypothesis, significant differences at the .05 level were found on eight questionnaire items. The student committee members agreed significantly more strongly than the local project directors with items one, three, four, and fifteen on the questionnaire. The local project directors agreed significantly more strongly than the members of the student committee with items two, elever, twelve, and eighteen. No other significant differences between the mean scores of the two groups on the individual items were found at the .05 level of significance.

TABLE I

DIFFERENCES IN MEAN SCORES ON A QUESTIONNAIRE OF SEVENTY-EIGHT STUDENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND NINETEEN LOCAL PROJECT DIRECTORS AND ASSISTANT PROJECT DIRECTORS

| STATEMENTS | MEAN SCORES[1] Students N = 78 | Proj. Directors N = 19 | t-ratio | Level of Significance[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The student committee should engage in only those activities assigned to it by the teachers or the school administration. | 3.28 | 4.00 | -2.23 | 0.028* |
| 2. The student committee should make long-range proposals related to the improvement of the improvement of the vocational education program in the local school. | 2.18 | 1.74 | +2.49 | 0.016* |
| 3. Vocational teachers should be present at the meetings of the student committee. | 2.31 | 3.37 | -4.18 | 0.000*** |
| 4. The principal should be present at the meetings of the student committee. | 2.82 | 3.79 | -3.09 | 0.003** |
| 5. Free discussion of issues in student committee meetings should be encouraged strongly. | 1.37 | 1.26 | +0.81 | 0.418 |

TABLE I (cont'd)

| STATEMENTS | MEAN SCORES[1] Students N = 78 | Proj. Directors N = 19 | t-ratio | Level of Significance[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. Student committees should evaluate their own work and effectiveness. | 2.10 | 1.68 | +1.67 | 0.098 |
| 7. Records should be kept of the proceedings of each committee meeting. | 1.60 | 1.47 | +0.85 | 0.398 |
| 8. Student committees should make evaluations regarding the improvement of vocational course offerings. | 1.86 | 1.74 | +0.78 | 0.433 |
| 9. Membership in the student committee should represent students of various grade levels. | 2.08 | 1.79 | +1.44 | 0.159 |
| 10. The student committee should make evaluations regarding local vocational youth organizations. | 2.33 | 2.26 | +0.29 | 0.772 |
| 11. Minutes of student committee meetings should be duplicated and distributed to committee members promptly. | 2.17 | 1.68 | +3.13 | 0.003** |
| 12. Teachers should not serve as voting members of the student committee. | 2.50 | 1.63 | +4.31 | 0.000*** |

TABLE I (cont'd)

| STATEMENTS | MEAN SCORES[1] Students N = 78 | Proj. Directors N = 19 | t-ratio | Level of Significance[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. The student committee should operate under a set of rules and regulations adopted by the school teachers and administrators. | 3.10 | 3.26 | -0.53 | 0.599 |
| 14. Student committees should make recommendations regarding the improvement of vocational education facilities. | 1.77 | 1.89 | -0.65 | 0.515 |
| 15. Meetings of the student committee should be scheduled regularly. | 1.78 | 2.58 | -3.05 | 0.006** |
| 16. Members of the student committee should elect their own officers | 1.68 | 1.63 | +0.26 | 0.796 |
| 17. Members of the student committee should make suggestions regarding the improvement of the vocational education program. | 1.67 | 1.68 | -0.09 | 0.924 |

TABLE I (cont'd)

| STATEMENTS | MEAN SCORES [1] Students N = 78 | Proj. Directors N = 19 | t-ratio | Level of Significance[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18. Meetings of the student committee should be held only when there is sufficient need. | 3.26 | 2.53 | +2.35 | 0.021* |
| 19. Teachers should make the final selection of committee members. | 2.96 | 2.79 | +0.70 | 0.486 |
| 20. There should be a definite agenda for each committee meeting. | 2.21 | 1.79 | +1.82 | 0.072 |
| 21. The student committee on evaluation should continue to serve in future years. | 1.67 | 1.74 | -0.43 | 0.667 |

[1]Based upon a scoring scale of SA=1, A=2, U=3, D=4, and SD=5.
[2]Two-tailed test of significance.
*Significant at the .05 level.
**Significant at the .01 level.
***Significant at the .001 level.

The analysis of item one indicated the local project directors disagreed more strongly than the student committee members that the student committee should engage in only those activities assigned to it by the teachers or the school administration. The mean score of the project directors was 4.00, while the mean score of the students was 3.28. The t-ratio of 2.23 was significant at the .05 level. This finding indicated that the local project directors felt more strongly than the members of the student committee that the activities of the student committee should not be limited only to those activities assigned by the teachers or the school administration.

The analysis of the data regarding item two revealed that the local project directors agreed more strongly than the student committee members that the student committee should make long-range proposals for the improvement of the vocational education program in the local school. The mean score of the project directors was 1.74, while the mean score of the students was 2.18. The t-ratio was significant at the .05 level. This finding indicated the project directors agreed more strongly than the students that long-range proposals relating to improvements in school vocational education programs should be made by the student committee.

The analysis of item three indicated that the students agreed that the vocational teachers should be present at student committee meetings, while the local project directors tended to be undecided concerning the presence of vocational teachers at meetings of the student committee. The mean score

of the students was 2.31, while the mean score for the project directors was 3.37. The t-ratio was significant at the .001 level. This finding suggested that the students were more willing than the local project directors to have vocational teachers present at student committee meetings.

According to the analysis of item four the students tended to agree that the principal should be present at student committee meetings. The mean score of the students was 2.82, while the mean score of the local project directors was 3.79. The t-ratio was significant at the .01 level. This finding indicated that the students were more willing for the school principal to be present at the meetings of the student committee than were the local project directors.

Analysis of item eleven indicated that the local project directors agreed more strongly than the students that the minutes of student committee should be duplicated and distributed to committee members promptly. The mean score of the local project directors was 1.68, while the mean score of the students was 2.17. The t-ratio was significant at the .01 level. This finding suggested that the local project directors were more in favor of duplicating and distributing the minutes of student committee meetings than were the students.

As revealed by the analysis of item twelve, the local project directors agreed more strongly than the students that teachers should not serve as voting members of the student committee. The mean score of the local project directors was

1.63, while the mean score for the students was 2.50. The t-ratio was significant at the .001 level.

According to the analysis of item fifteen, the students agreed more strongly than the local project directors that student committee meetings should be scheduled regularly. The mean score for the students was 1.78, while the mean score for the local project directors was 2.58. The t-ratio was significant at the .01 level. This finding indicated that students felt more strongly than local project directors that regularly scheduled meetings of the student committee were necessary.

The analysis of item eighteen indicated that the local project directors agreed more strongly than the students that committee meetings should be held only when there is sufficient need for them. The students tended to be undecided concerning this item. The mean score of the local project directors was 2.53, while the mean score of the students was 3.26. The t-ratio was significant at the .05 level. This finding pointed out that the local project directors felt more strongly than the students that meetings should be held only when there was sufficient need for them.

No significant differences between the mean scores of the two groups on other individual items of the questionnaire were found at the .05 level of significance based upon the analysis of the data. In general, both the local project directors and the members of the student committees tended to agree with the remaining items on the questionnaire. Both

groups agreed that free discussion of issues in student committee meetings should be encouraged strongly; that student committees should evaluate their own work and effectiveness; that records should be kept of the proceedings of each committee meeting; that student committees should make evaluations regarding the improvement of vocational course offerings; that membership on the student committee should represent students of various grade levels; that the student committee should make evaluations regarding local vocational youth organizations; and that student committees should make recommendations regarding the improvement of vocational education facilities. They also agreed that members of the student committees should elect their own officers; that members of the student committee should make suggestions regarding the improvement of the vocational education program; that there should be a definite agenda for each committee meeting; and that the student committee on evaluation should continue to serve in future years.

The local project directors and the student committee members tended to be undecided on two items on the questionnaire. They were undecided as to whether or not the student committee should operate under a set of rules and regulations adopted by the school teachers and administrators. Both groups were also undecided on the statement that teachers should make the final selection of committee members.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations formulated by the writers were based upon knowledge gained while directing the Central Kentucky Vocational Education Evaluation Project and while directing this study. Recommendations were also based upon observations made during the study and the statistical findings of the study. The recommendations are:

1. School systems currently using student committees should continue to do so. Evidence collected from the project and assistant project directors indicated that the student committees had made a significant contribution to the evaluation effort in the school system.

2. School systems who have not organized a student committee should do so. Responses of the local project and assistant project directors offered evidence that school systems conducting evaluation projects have much to gain by organizing a student committee.

3. Student committees should be organized to provide insight into areas other than evaluation. Results of the findings indicated that student committees had a valuable contribution to make in the areas of program planning and implementation as well as program evaluation. Results also indicated that students made valuable recommendations regarding the operation of the educational program.

4. Further use and experimentation with student committees is needed. The implications of the study are that use of student committees in program planning, implementation

and evaluation is an untapped resource of information, opinion, and assistance. Students should be involved in program improvement endeavors.

5. Additional research should be conducted to clarify more explicitly the organization, role, and function of student committees. Evidence collected during the study indicated that there were certain areas of disagreement and indecisiveness between the local project and assistant project directors and the student committee members regarding the organization, role, and function of the student committees.

6. Research regarding the organization and use of student committees not included in this study should be conducted. The findings of this study should be replicated and questions other than those raised in this study should be asked. The survey of research conducted prior to the study indicated a dearth of research in the area of effective student involvement in educational planning, implementation, and evaluation.

7. The importance of student committees and the contribution that they can make to educational programs should be taught in preservice and inservice teacher education programs. Teacher educators should instruct present and potential teachers of the value of using student committees and should develop procedures and techniques for organizing and using students in program planning, development, implementation, and evaluation. Based on observations made during the study, it was discovered that very few educators had focused previously on meaningful student involvement.